



## the FORGOTTEN GOD

# GOING DEEPER

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

April 24, 2016

## Discussion Guide

### We Serve (by the Spirit)

#### Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they state they have held back.)

#### Getting Started:

10 minutes

- Do you think God want to use someone like you to do something significant in his Kingdom? Could you elaborate?

#### Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Using the notes, discuss the background and context of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the early believers.

- Read Acts 1.1-11 aloud. Pause. Read the text once more seeking to imagine the scene.
- As you experience the scene, what roles does the Holy Spirit fill? Do any of these surprise you? Could you elaborate?
- Luke is careful to note that ministry, including that of Jesus, in the Kingdom of God is Spirit-driven and empowered. Do people typically think of ministry in these terms? Could you explain?
- Read Acts 2.1-13 aloud. Pause. Read the text once more seeking to imagine you are present and experiencing the events which unfold.
- As you experience this scene, where is the Holy Spirit and what is he doing? Why might he be doing these things?
- While this text is describing what happened rather than prescribing what must happen, we can learn something about the way the Holy Spirit works. As you experience this scene, what do you notice about how the Holy Spirit empowers and guides people into ministry for the Kingdom?
- Do you believe the Holy Spirit can work in you in the same way today? Could you elaborate?

- If the Holy Spirit could enable you to do what was necessary for ministry, what impact might this have upon how you serve within the Kingdom? Could you elaborate?
- What might it look like to serve in a way which was empowered by the Holy Spirit?
- Consider closing by affirming the work of the Holy Spirit in one another. You might do this by calling out ways you have seen the Spirit lead and empower the members of your group to serve in his Kingdom. This goes beyond talents and passions to ways you have seen people stretch and do what they might not normally have done. Pray for the grace to yield to the Spirit and for the growth of his Kingdom.

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

### PENTECOST

Pentecost is the Greek name for the Israelite Feast of Weeks. The Feast of Weeks was a Spring Harvest Festival, the second of three annual pilgrimage festivals for the Jewish people. This festival was to be held fifty days after the offering of the sheaf of first fruits at the time of Passover (Leviticus 23.9-16). In later Judaism, this festival came to be associated with the giving of the Law and Covenant at Sinai. On this day, God descended to Mount Sinai in fire so that the mountain was covered in smoke. The people heard a loud trumpet sound and the mountain trembled and then God spoke (Exodus 19.1-19).

In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit descends upon the followers of Jesus on Pentecost. The echoes of Sinai experience are hard to miss which may provide some reasoning behind why God chose this day to give his Spirit to the early believers. Not unlike Sinai, in Acts 2, God descends and there is a loud sound and fire. Further, God speaks, this time through the followers of Jesus (Acts 2.1-4). If one understands this event to mark the beginning of the Church (there is debate about this statement), then one might also hear the echo of covenant formation. At the very least, Acts 2 marks a new chapter in the unfolding of the Gospel, the appearance of God in such a way that would guide the followers of Jesus from that point forward.

## THE TEXT

### ACTS 1.1-11: KINGDOM WORK REQUIRES THE HOLY SPIRIT

The book of Acts is actually the second volume of a two-volume work by Luke detailing the unfolding of the Kingdom of God through the work and ministry of Jesus. Both books begin with a literary prologue noting the intended audience as Theophilus (Luke 1.1-4; Acts 1.1-3). While commentators since Origen have sought to determine whether Theophilus was an actual person and probable patron of the work or a metaphor for those who love God (Theophilus means lover of God), there is no reason to doubt that Theophilus could have actually existed. The name is common from the third-century BC and a work such as Luke-Acts would require financial backing to publish.

While the two books are linked by the theme of the Kingdom of God, the means of the expansion of this Kingdom differs between the books. The Gospel of Luke focuses upon what Jesus said and did while Acts focuses on what the followers of Jesus said and did. What is important to note is that both Jesus and his disciples ministered for the Kingdom of God by the Holy Spirit. Luke makes this point early in his Gospel. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3.22), filled and guided him into a time of temptation (Luke 4.1) and then into the beginning of his ministry (Luke 4.14). Jesus himself noted that his ministry was Spirit-driven (Luke 4.18). Luke echoes this point in his prologue by noting that Jesus' ministry and teaching with his disciples was done through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1.2). This is more than a passing comment because the entirety of the Kingdom ministry of the disciples is Holy Spirit-driven (Acts 1.8, 2.1-11). Luke has taken great pains to note that the Kingdom ministry of the disciples is not unlike that of Jesus. All Kingdom ministry is Holy Spirit-driven.

Luke notes that the ministry of Jesus continued after the resurrection, including forty days of time spent with the disciples demonstrating that he had truly risen from the dead. During this period, Jesus instructed his disciples not to leave Jerusalem—perhaps they were tempted to leave since Passover had been completed—but to stay so they might receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 15-16). The disciples understood Jesus to be speaking about the eschatological (end time) event when God would elevate his people and bring all nations together

for judgment, an event which includes the pouring out of God's Spirit (Joel 2.28-32). Jesus does not deny that what is being experienced is an eschatological event, nor does he deny that the pouring out of the Spirit marks the beginning of this event, a point Peter picks upon (Acts 2.18-21). He simply counters the disciples' understanding of God's bringing these events to completion, something else Peter picks up on as he quotes all of Joel 2.28-32 except the statement of final judgment. Timing of final judgment belongs to God. Jesus instructs his disciples not to be concerned with God's timing, but to be his witnesses in an ever-expanding way to the ends of the earth. To be a witness of Jesus involves more than simply speaking about Jesus but includes the carrying on of his message and ministry. This carrying on of the ministry and message of Jesus required the same power Jesus possessed, a power which came from the Holy Spirit. Jesus promises the disciples will receive this same power.

With this instruction Jesus ascends, leaving his disciples to carry on his message and ministry. The disciples are amazed at the ascension of Jesus but heavenly messengers redirect their attention earthward. They are not to look to the sky. Jesus would return. With this instruction to look earthward, the disciples return to Jerusalem and wait for the fulfillment of Jesus' promise.

### **ACTS 2.1-13: THE SPIRIT COMES**

The disciples waited a little over a week, gathering in an upper room to pray (Acts 1.14-26). On the day of Pentecost, a sound like a blowing wind was heard and a fire appeared which then separated and came to rest upon each of them. Wind is often means of referring to the Spirit (Ezekiel 37.9-14) and God often appears in fire (Exodus 3.2; 19.1-19). These signs indicate God has shown up. The promise of Jesus had been fulfilled. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and immediately begin to speak in tongues. There has been no little debate as to the nature of the tongues spoken and whether the miracle that takes place is a miracle of hearing or a miracle of speaking. While anything is possible, the context leans toward the speaking of known languages (Acts 2.8) and not glossolalia or ecstatic speech.

The purpose of this miracle appears to be in

keeping with the reality that Jews and God-fearers from all over the known world were in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. The Spirit seems to have enabled the disciples (120 at this point) to speak in ways which could be understood by those present. Thus, the Spirit has made it possible for the Kingdom to grow by making it possible for people to hear the wonders which God had done in and through Jesus (Acts 2.11).

### **1 CORINTHIANS 12.1-11: CONTROVERSY ABOUT THE SPIRIT**

From Pentecost onward, Holy Spirit figures prominently in the forward progression of the Kingdom of God through the ministry of believers. However, it didn't take long before controversies began to surface regarding the nature of the Spirit's involvement in the early Church. Paul addresses some of these controversies in his first letter to the Church at Corinth. These controversies involved spiritual gifts, or the means by which the Holy Spirit manifested himself in the lives of believers.

The controversy in Corinth which Paul addresses seems to concern the gift of speaking in tongues which may have arisen because the Corinthians were using cultural understandings to explain the ministry of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12.1-3). These understandings probably came from pagan worship practices which involved ecstatic speech. Whatever the source, the result was division within the Corinthian Church. Anytime division arises within the Church, something has gone wrong.

Paul addresses what has gone wrong by stressing that the Holy Spirit gives different kinds of gifts but that behind each of these gifts is one God. He makes this point by stating three times that there is untold variety to the way the Spirit works in the lives of believers but that the same God is behind the variety. This variety exists because God himself exists in variety, a point Paul makes by listing the full Trinity in verses 4-6. Paul's point seems to be that variety and unity can coexist. It is easy to imagine a scenario where the gift of tongues had been elevated to such a degree that those who did not possess this gift were excluded (1 Corinthians 12.21). Here Paul argues strongly for the importance of each gift and the unity the Holy Spirit brings thus freeing the Corinthians from the trap of comparing the manifestations of the Spirit among them.

Paul presses further into the controversy addressing

what may have been something of a self-aggrandizing motive associated with the gifts of the Spirit. Each gift was important but each had a common purpose, the common good not the elevation of the person who had the gift. What Paul is referring to with the mention of the common good certainly includes the good of the Church but the good of the Church involves the progression of the Kingdom. Thus, Paul is more than likely referring to the purpose of the gifts as associated with the ministry and message of Jesus. The gifts exist to help the Kingdom expand, and in this each person in the Church receives a different gift. However, each gift is necessary and determined by the Spirit and not people. It is hard not to think of Acts 2 and the gift of tongues at this point. The Spirit enabled the early believers to speak in tongues because that was necessary in the moment, the common good. Paul seems to remind the Corinthians that tongues cannot be the focus, but the progression of the Kingdom. If tongues are necessary, they will be given. If other gifts are necessary, they will be given. In the giving of gifts, the Spirit is the determining factor and he distributes the gifts among the believers in a way he feels is best.

### REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

How do I serve in the Kingdom of God in any significant way? This is always the question that haunts me. On my best days I am more than aware of how inadequate I am. I am not smart enough to plan sermon series. I am not wise enough to have the words people need to hear. I can't even type an email or a guide like this one without it being pure drivel. This is reality and I have lived in this reality for a long time trying to change it. Throughout most of my ministry career I have read and learned and pondered so I could be enough to serve in God's Kingdom. It has been an exhausting journey and I have come to the end. I haven't arrived, mind you. I am just giving up. I have come to the conclusion I will never be enough. . .and it is just fine. I don't have to be enough. I don't have to come up with exciting sermons. Are there such a thing? I don't have to change the world with a blog or a guide. I don't have to come up with just the right words. All of this comes from the Spirit, not me. If I want to serve in a significant way, I must serve by the Holy Spirit. I don't know how I have missed this

for so many years. It is probably due, in large part, to the lack of emphasis on the Holy Spirit in my religious upbringing, but who knows for sure. What I know is that Jesus ministered by the Holy Spirit. His disciples ministered by the Holy Spirit. Paul ministered by the Holy Spirit, and so many others after him. Why should I be different? It isn't easy to give up old ways. It is hard to sit down at the computer and not think, "What should I say?" I am learning, more and more, that this isn't the right question. I am learning to say, "Holy Spirit, speak through me."

### REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

Many of us feel inadequate when it comes to Kingdom ministry. Maybe we think we can hold a baby or serve some snacks. Maybe we could take up the offering, but anything beyond that? Forget about it. We don't have what it takes. We don't have what it takes to teach, to encourage, to listen or counsel. We don't have what it takes to plan or guide or shepherd. We don't have it in us. There is some truth to this and there is a bit of untruth to it. On our own we are not able to do anything of significance in the ministry of the Kingdom of God. Good thing we are not on our own! If we are followers of Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit in us, and if he is in us we are more than adequate. You see, ministry is the job of the Holy Spirit. Even Jesus' ministry was guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Why should ours be different? The Spirit has uniquely gifted you for ministry and he can give you what you need in unique opportunities of ministry. All you have to do is make room for him. This week, consider stepping forward to serve in the Kingdom by praying, "Holy Spirit, move through me." You might pray this as you step forward to volunteer in a capacity within Union Center, or you might pray this as a unique opening is given to you with a neighbor or co-worker. Lean on him. Allow him to speak. He makes you more than adequate.



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PASTOR  
**BLAKE**  
SHIPP

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